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# DMV clerk accused of taking bribes for years in ticket-fixing scheme

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A clerk at the Harlem office of the state's Department of Motor Vehicles took bribes for years to fix tickets, while another steered cases to lawyers for cash and meals, authorities said Friday.

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DMV clerk accused of taking bribes for years in ticket-fixing scheme

In an astonishing admission, a supervisor at the East 125th Street facility said she was informed by a defense lawyer as far back as 2012 that a clerk was taking payoffs but did nothing because she wasn't given his name, officials said.

DMV clerk Sam Alexis at the Northern Manhattan Traffic Violations Bureau received up to \$600 a week in bribes on top of his salary by accepting between \$20 and \$100 from ticketed motorists or their lawyers to quash summonses, according to state Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott.

The investigation also found that clerk Alicia Eddie improperly retrieved confidential information from the DMV computer system to referred motorists to Alexis in exchange for \$10 each time.

Alexis, Eddie and one former clerk were also accused of steering motorists to certain defense lawyers in exchange for cash or meals. Officials said they often texted or called attorneys throughout the workday to make the referrals.

Incredibly, the bureau co-supervisor, Sonia Wise, who has worked at the TVB for almost two decades and been a supervising clerk since 2007, testified under oath that she became aware of a potential ticket-fixing scheme in 2012 or 2013, when a lawyer informed her that an unnamed clerk was running a bribery scheme.

"Unconvincingly, Wise claimed to the Inspector General that because [the] Attorney had not named the clerk, she did not need to take further action, and did not report [the] Attorney's assertion to anyone, including her supervisors, others at DMV, or the Inspector General," the report said.

"Wise's inaction allowed Alexis's scheme to continue unabated until this investigation."

Phone records showed that Alexis and other clerks had hundreds of interactions with defense lawyers during work hours because they lacked "meaningful supervision," the IG said.

Supervisors admitted that clerks fraternizing with lawyers was a "big problem" but did nothing to stop it, the report said.

Alexis admitted to the ticket-fixing operation in sworn testimony, according to authorities.

"If the person seems like a down-to-earth person, I'll just tell them, 'Look, we can take care [of the ticket] now if you want. You'll get your receipt; it'll be done today.' And if they say yes, they want to do that — of course, I say it in a way that they know.... that this is under the books, you know what I mean — and I send them to the [hearing] room, they get it dismissed. When they come back out, they hand me the money and then that's how I do that," Alexis was quoted as telling investigators.

Alexis also explained the scheme of getting payola from lawyers for referring them motorists with tickets.

"Basically, all we do is, if a motorist has a lot of points or if he's facing possible suspension of his license . . . we tell them, 'You know, you might want to think about hiring a lawyer. If you do want to go that route, I can let you know who to speak to. I can recommend you somebody,'" he said.

The IG report said the case was presented to prosecutors for criminal prosecution but was declined, without explanation.

The findings were also forwarded to the state Joint Commission on Public Ethics and the state court system's Attorney Grievance Committee for any appropriate actions against private attorneys involved in corruption.

The IG's recommendations, including disciplinary actions, new anti-corruption policies and additional training for DMV employees, were all accepted by DMV and implemented.

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"y investigation found a Traffic Violations Bureau mired in corrupt practices, from public employees taking cash for fixing tickets to  
years offering clerks improper payments and gifts to garner new clients, all while under woefully deficient direct oversight," said IG  
Leahy Scott.

"These were routine practices at a facility where well-established policies and rules were spurned, and I am pleased the DMV has taken  
these issues extremely seriously with a commitment toward substantial reforms."

The DMV said it was installing new cameras above workstations to deter corruption, limiting employee access to confidential records and  
providing new ethics training.

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